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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DECEMBER 18 GULF SECURITY DIALOGUE
WITH QATAR

REF: DOHA 1125

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) In November, Qatar's Amir told the Commander of CENTCOM, Admiral Fallon, that he wants the Qatari leadership to seek ways to deepen its military partnership with the U.S. at all levels. While a desirable goal given the considerable equities we have in our relationship with Qatar, the Amir's simultaneous desire to pursue relationships with countries such as Syria and Iran, which the U.S. regards as rogues, and policies in Lebanon, Sudan, and the Palestinian Territories that are antithetical to U.S. interests, presents challenges as we seek to deepen this strategic relationship.

¶2. (S) This third installment of the Gulf Security Dialogue on December 18, however, presents an opportunity to discuss these issues with the GOQ directly. The U.S. could gain more insight into - and to influence - the geo-political mindset of the Qatari leadership. It will also allow us to increase our mil-mil engagement, gain input into Qatar's own military/strategic planning, help align Qatar's strategic approach with our own, increase Qatari participation in Coalition activities, and ultimately, pursue sales of U.S. military equipment. The following is keyed to the six pillars of the GSD agenda.

REGIONAL SECURITY

¶3. (S) Iran hangs heavily over the U.S.-Qatar relationship. Although release of the recent NIE on Iran may have lowered the temperature a bit, the Qataris are still concerned that we have plans for Iran, perhaps even military plans, which we are not sharing with them, and they fear that a U.S. military strike on Iran could bring devastating retaliation on Qatar.

¶4. (S) Qatari officials privately express concern about Iran's role in the region and its pursuit of nuclear weapons - which they believe is unstoppable. They agree with our analysis of Iran's revolutionary motivations and goals and note Iran's active support for subversive elements in the region. Qatar regards Iran as its major existential threat and fears - probably correctly - that it could face violent retaliation in the event of U.S.-Iran military conflict. But since they share with Iran the world's largest field of non-associated natural gas - the source of much of their future wealth - Qatar is reluctant to do anything to antagonize the Iranian government.

¶5. (C) At the May 24, 2007 bilateral Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) we raised the Qatari Prime Minister's earlier (and surprising) declaration that "Qatar would not serve as the base for any military operation against Iran." While acknowledging that the U.S. has no intention of launching

military action against Iran at this time, we noted the tactical value of maintaining ambiguity around the question as a disincentive to Iran's aggressive posture in the region.

The Qataris accepted the point and said they would aim to steer away from similar declarations in the future.

¶6. (C) Qatar nevertheless strongly believes that engagement rather than isolation is the way to deal with Iran.

Foreign/Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) reiterated this at the December 8 IISS conference in Bahrain where he said "I don't think we can try to solve our problems through trying to seal Iran off from the region," adding that "being pushed in a military confrontation with Iran" would not be in the interest of the region.

¶7. (C) On other regional political issues, the U.S. side should expect criticism of our approach to the Israeli-Palestinian file and our efforts (and those of the Fayyad government) to exclude and isolate Hamas. The Qataris' message will be that Qatar has no love for Hamas' ideology, but excluding them will doom any peacemaking efforts to failure. Likewise, Qatar opposes a policy of isolating Syria, arguing (as the Amir has) that Syria "is an important country and can't be ignored."

¶8. (C) We proposed adding piracy to the regional security agenda because this is one area where Qatar has first-hand experience and thus a vested interest in sharing information and cooperating in practical ways. U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command (NAVCENT) would like very much for Qatar to join, and make physical contributions to the Coalition Naval Forces in the Gulf, as have several other GCC countries. Even a nominal contribution of ensuring they are patrolling their own Economic Exclusion Zone on a continual basis, and

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including their patrol schedule with the Coalition Naval Forces schedule would be an acceptable start. This will lead to an increase in the need to maintain open communications with the Coalition Maritime Component and foster a climate of increased information sharing with the Qatar Emiri Navy.

CRITICAL ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION (CEIP)

¶9. (C) At the May 24 Gulf Security Dialogue in Doha, the GOQ agreed to establish a U.S.-Qatar Joint Working Group (JWG) to protect critical energy infrastructure. Such a JWG would be co-chaired on the Qatari side by the Director of Industrial Security for Qatar Petroleum, the state-run oil and gas company. Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister Mohamad Al-Rumaihi later suggested that gaining Qatari buy-in to the CEIP will require a considerable amount of (Qatari) interagency coordination which the MFA is not well placed to undertake. He urged the Embassy to coordinate directly with the members of the Qatar's National Security Committee, including MOI and Qatar State Security.

The Minister of State for Internal Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Al Thani told Charge in October that he remains open to working with the United States on CEIP though QP's security chief demurred, noting in the same meeting that the GOQ is still waiting for the results of a private sector study they had commissioned and after receipt of that would be in a better position to work with the USG. The GSD is an opportunity to elicit Qatar perspectives on threats to their energy installations and press the GOQ on participation in CEIP.

ENHANCED DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES AND COOPERATION

¶10. (S) At the strategic level, bilateral military relations are generally excellent. An extremely advantageous (for the U.S.) Defense Cooperation Agreement governs the U.S. military presence in Qatar, which hosts approximately 9,000

U.S. forces, some 100 U.S. and Coalition aircraft, as well as the CENTCOM Forward Headquarters, the Combined Air Operations Center, SOCCENT Forward Headquarters, and other important DOD facilities. Qatar had no objection to stationing B1 bombers and Patriot missile batteries here, and regularly sends military personnel to the U.S. for training. And after years of sourcing their military hardware in Europe, Qatar has finally - with the recent, though yet unannounced, decision to buy C-17 transport aircraft - started buying American.

¶11. (S) As Qatar moves forward with defense purchases, interoperability with U.S. and coalition partners will become a critical concern that the QAF is just beginning to recognize. Their need for an integrated national/military security strategy is obvious and while CENTCOM has made previous overtures to assist in security strategic planning development, the QAF has been slow to respond. With the advent of their first major defense acquisition, readdressing the strategic review may gain traction. .

¶12. (C) Meanwhile, U.S. military elements in Qatar have experienced working-level problems, particularly customs clearance delays for military cargo and prickliness about perceived violations of Qatari sovereignty, that threaten to degrade U.S. operational readiness. These problems are being worked through CENTCOM-Embassy-GOQ engagement and, while troublesome, have thus far not bled into the larger strategic relationship. A recently initialed agreement in customs procedures promises to ease these problems considerably.

DEVELOPING A SHARED ASSESSMENT AND AGENDA ON IRAQ SECURITY OVERVIEW (U.S.)

¶13. (S) In our most in-depth discussion on Iraq with the Qatari leadership, Ambassador Ryan Crocker visited Qatar on October 31 to brief HBJ on progress in Iraq and to ask his assessment of building on this progress with the help of Arab states. HBJ said Qatar wanted the U.S. to succeed in Iraq and agreed with Ambassador Crocker that the Arabs need to collaborate with the U.S. on finding a solution that gives Iraq and the region security. He proposed collaboration on a "road map" for Iraq with this aim as well as eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces. HBJ voiced Qatar's frustration at finding itself on the outside of U.S.-led initiatives in the region and emphasized that Qatar wants to help.

¶14. (S) HBJ stressed the importance of wresting Syria away from the Iranian camp and argued that the Syrians were pragmatic merchants who could be swayed with the right deal,

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such as discussion of peace negotiations that would include Syria on the issue of the Golan Heights. HBJ believed Syria's attachment to Iran resulted from a sense of isolation and belief that it was a target of regime change. Ambassador Crocker said U.S. policy was not regime change, but policy change, in Syria and Iran. He encouraged HBJ, as he had other Arab leaders on his regional tour, to visit Baghdad. HBJ acknowledged that while security is always given as the rationale for the failure of Qatar and other Arab states to open an embassy in Baghdad, the real reason is dissatisfaction with the exclusion of Sunnis from decision making at highest levels of the Iraqi government.

COUNTER-PROLIFERATION

¶15. (C) Qatar signed on to the Proliferation Security Initiative and sent observers to sea exercises off Bahrain. However, Qatar's understanding of the PSI principles is weak from a legal perspective, and their willingness to take on a more active role is uncertain. This may be driven in part by their reluctance to get involved in something - such as

boarding of naval vessels in the Gulf - that could put them in direct confrontation with Iran. The GSD is an opportunity to urge more active participation in PSI, including in actual maritime operations. The Qataris have dodged every effort to discuss Chemical Weapons Convention MOU on challenge inspections; the GSD is the only (reasonable) remaining forum to advance the issue. The Qataris have not responded to our initial invitation to join the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTERNAL SECURITY

¶16. (S) Cooperation with the U.S. on counterterrorism, and particularly intelligence-sharing, is currently the worst of all GCC states. Qatar's growth as a regional transit hub for both people and goods makes improved cooperation in this area a particular priority.

RATNEY